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Report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel

I. Introduction

1. In a letter dated 29 December 2016 (S/2016/1129), the Security Council extended the mandate of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) until 31 December 2019 and requested me to submit a report every six months on the implementation of its mandate. The present report covers the period from 1 July to 31 December 2017 and provides an overview of developments and trends in West Africa and the Sahel. It also outlines the activities of UNOWAS and progress made in the implementation of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel. In addition, it provides an update on the situation in the Lake Chad basin, pursuant to Security Council resolution 2349 (2017).

II. Developments and trends in West Africa and the Sahel

2. During the reporting period, political tensions relating to constitutional reform and political dialogue processes in Guinea, Mauritania, the Niger and Togo took centre stage in those countries. Elections were held in Liberia and Senegal, while electoral preparations continued in Guinea and Sierra Leone. Some progress was made in key reform processes in Burkina Faso and the Gambia. Nevertheless, the security situation in West Africa and the Sahel remained fragile. Terrorist activities and cross-border crime, including piracy and trafficking in drugs and weapons, continued to pose threats to the stability of the region. While activities by Boko Haram surged, a significant number of the group's fighters surrendered to national authorities. There were also internal security challenges in Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria. Although the humanitarian situation in the region remained dire, West African economies continued their positive trajectory. Moreover, several countries made progress in the promotion and protection of human rights.

A. Political and governance trends

3. In Burkina Faso, the constitutional reform and national reconciliation processes continued slowly. Meanwhile, the Speaker of the National Assembly and Chair of the ruling Mouvement du peuple pour le progrès, Salif Diallo, passed away in France on 19 August. He was replaced by Alassane Bala Sakandé, also a member of the ruling party, on 8 September. On 10 October, the former Minister for Foreign Affairs, Djibril

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Bassole, was temporarily released from prison pending trial and placed under house arrest. He had been imprisoned since September 2015 because of his alleged involvement in the failed coup attempt of 2015. His release renewed controversy about the capacity of the judicial authorities to speedily bring to trial individuals accused of crimes committed under the previous political dispensation.

4. In Côte d'Ivoire, a government reshuffle was announced on 19 July. The Minister of the Interior and Security, Hamed Bakayoko, was reassigned to the Ministry of Defence, while his former post went to the former Mayor of Abidjan, Sidiki Diakite. Changes also occurred within the ruling Rassemblement des republicains (RDR), which held its third congress on 9 and 10 September. During the congress, Henriette Diabaté, who has been Secretary-General of RDR since 1999, was elected President of the party, while the current Prime Minister, Amadou Gon Coulibaly, was appointed its First Vice-President.

5. In the Gambia, the administration of the President, Adama Barrow, launched reform processes in the areas of security, transitional justice and reconciliation. Rumours of possible attempts by supporters of the former President, Yahya Jammeh, to destabilize the country from abroad did not materialize. Political tension remained localized in the Foni area, a stronghold of the former President. To mitigate the tension, a dialogue and reconciliation event was organized by the National Council for Civic Education with residents of the area in June. On 8 September, Fatoumata Tambajang was appointed Vice-President, following the adoption of a constitutional amendment raising the age limit for serving as President or Vice-President from 65 to 75 years. She was sworn in on 9 November.

6. In Guinea, the Independent National Electoral Commission announced that local elections would be held on 4 February 2018. Meanwhile, the opposition continued to stage demonstrations calling for the full implementation of the political agreement of 12 October 2016 and suspended its participation in the follow-up committee responsible for overseeing the implementation of the agreement. Protests were also conducted by citizens in mining communities in the Boké region of the country to raise complaints about the inadequate provision of social services. In September, protesters clashed with security forces, which resulted in two deaths and several injuries.

7. In Liberia, general elections were held on 10 October. Twenty presidential candidates and 1,026 legislative candidates participated in the polls, which were marked by high voter turnout and a peaceful environment. Regional and international partners, including the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), deployed electoral observation missions. In the presidential election, George Weah, of the Coalition for Democratic Change, received 38.4 per cent of the vote, while the incumbent Vice-President, Joseph Boakai, of the Unity Party, came in second with 28.8 per cent. A run-off presidential election, initially scheduled for 7 November, was postponed by the Supreme Court following the filing of complaints against the National Elections Commission management of the electoral process by the Ali Liberia Coalition Party, the Liberty Party and the Unity Party. On 7 December, the Court dismissed the complaints for lack of evidence and ordered the National Elections Commission to proceed with scheduling the run-off. It has now been scheduled for 26 December.

8. In Mauritania, a constitutional referendum called by the President, Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz, was held on 5 August. It approved the abolishment of the Senate and the establishment of regional councils, in addition to changes to the national flag, the national anthem and the composition of the Constitutional Court. Several opposition parties and civil society organizations, which had campaigned for a boycott of the referendum, rejected its results. They argued that the referendum could

pave the way for further constitutional changes to extend presidential powers and remove term limits. The President has repeatedly denied such claims. Following the referendum, the opposition leader, Mohamed Ould Ghadda, who had been an outspoken opponent of the referendum, was arrested on allegations of corruption. A number of senators and journalists were also summoned and interrogated.

9. In the Niger, tensions between the ruling party and the opposition continued in the absence of an inclusive dialogue process. A new electoral code, under which a permanent independent national electoral commission was established, was adopted on 14 October.

10. Nigeria witnessed renewed secessionist agitation for an independent Biafra State in the south-eastern part of the country. The agitation exposed persisting ethnic and religious divisions between mainly Muslim communities in the north and Christian Igbo communities in the south-east. In what was considered a counter-move to the agitation, the Arewa Youth Forum, a coalition of youth leaders in northern Nigeria, issued an ultimatum to all members of the Igbo community residing in the north to leave the region by 1 October. In response, the then Acting President, Yemi Osinbajo, led consultations with political, religious and traditional authorities to promote national unity. In addition, following his return from medical leave abroad, the President, Muhammadu Buhari, underscored in a speech on 21 August that the unity of Nigeria was "not negotiable". Meanwhile, the Government continued to pursue its anti-graft campaign. In that regard, the exoneration of the President of the Senate, Abubakar Bukola Saraki, from charges of fraud prompted civil society activists to question the independence of the judiciary.

11. In Senegal, legislative elections were held on 30 July. The ruling coalition, Benno Bokk Yakaar, secured 125 out of the 165 seats in the National Assembly. The coalition led by the former President, Abdoulaye Wade, came second. Although elected to the parliament, the Mayor of Dakar, Khalifa Sall, has remained in detention since March on charges of mismanagement of public funds.

12. In Sierra Leone, preparations continued for the holding of presidential, legislative and local elections scheduled for 7 March 2018. Violent incidents, involving party supporters, occurred throughout the reporting period. Meanwhile, the constitutional referendum, which had been scheduled for September 2017, was not held.

13. In Togo, a wave of protests was initiated by the opposition Parti national panafricain on 19 August in Lome, Sokode and Kara. The protesters amplified their long-standing demands for a return to the Constitution of 1992, the introduction of a two-round voting system for the presidential election and the full implementation of the comprehensive political agreement of 2006, signed by the Government, the opposition and other national stakeholders. On 19 September, the National Assembly adopted a bill to amend the Constitution by reintroducing presidential term limits and a two-round voting modality for the presidential election. The opposition boycotted the vote on the bill, as it did not include a provision, similar to that contained in the Constitution of 1992, stipulating that "under no circumstances" could a person serve for more than two presidential terms. Consequently, the parliamentary vote did not attain the four-fifths majority required to amend the Constitution and the bill was deferred, to be voted on through a referendum that has yet to be held. Regional leaders have since taken the lead in efforts to assist national stakeholders in peacefully resolving the crisis.

B. Security trends

14. The security situation in West Africa and the Sahel continued to be marked by asymmetrical and terrorist attacks against security forces and civilians. Some countries in the region faced several internal security challenges. In addition, maritime piracy, drug trafficking and transnational organized crime continued to affect the security situation.

15. In Burkina Faso, a terrorist attack in Ouagadougou, carried out on 13 August, resulted in 18 casualties. The northern province of Soum witnessed frequent attacks on military and civilian targets, leading to, among other things, the closure of many schools in the area. Meanwhile, militant activities, including those carried out by the home-grown Ansar al-Islam movement, gradually spread to the north-western part of the country.

16. In Côte d'Ivoire, the reporting period was marked by clashes relating to land in the cocoa belt, attacks against security facilities, a wave of jailbreaks and continuing protests by former elements of the Forces nouvelles who had been demobilized following the post-electoral crisis. On 7 September, the Minister of the Interior and Security announced that 35 people had been arrested following investigations into the attacks on security installations. On 9 November, the Chief of Protocol of the Speaker of the National Assembly, Souleymane Kamarate Kone, was arrested following an investigation into a cache of weapons that had been discovered in Bouake in May.

17. In Mali, the security situation was characterized by asymmetrical attacks against security forces and humanitarian actors as well as by fighting between parties signatory to the peace agreement. As a result, the anticipated reinstatement of State services faced challenges, while some local communities resorted to aligning themselves with militant groups for protection.

18. In the Niger, multiple attacks in the Tillaberi region resulted in the deaths of several security personnel, including members of a mixed patrol of special forces of the Niger and the United States of America, on 4 October. However, the number of violent incidents declined significantly in the Diffa region, on the border with north-eastern Nigeria.

19. Nigeria continued to face multiple security challenges. Security forces clashed with members of the secessionist Indigenous People of Biafra movement in Abia State in September. In addition, there were violent confrontations between farmers and herders in the Middle Belt and other regions, leading to increased intercommunal tensions. Some 100 people died as a result of two incidents that occurred in July, in Kaduna and Benue States. On 16 October, 29 people were killed while seeking shelter in a school in Plateau State. The level of armed violence in the Delta area remained low owing to the reinstated amnesty programme, new deployments of troops in six Delta states and peace initiatives by local, regional, and national leaders.

20. According to the International Maritime Bureau, the number of incidents of maritime piracy in the Gulf of Guinea fell slightly during the reporting period. Between January and September, the Bureau registered 31 actual and attempted attacks on vessels in the larger Gulf of Guinea area, compared with 46 incidents during the same period in 2016, accounting for one quarter of such incidents reported by the Bureau worldwide. The majority of the incidents occurred in Nigerian waters.

21. Drug trafficking and transnational organized crime remained a source of instability. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), several seizures of drugs were reported, including a number of cocaine shipments that were confiscated between Mali and the Niger in September. In Mauritania on 24 September, security forces arrested smugglers carrying drugs, weapons and

communications equipment. In Nigeria, the authorities reported the seizure of several container-loads of weapons being smuggled into the country.

Boko Haram

22. National and international efforts notwithstanding, attacks by Boko Haram surged during the reporting period, especially in Nigeria. Of the 156 suspected Boko Haram attacks carried out in July, August and September, 100 took place in Nigeria and 5 in the Niger. Overall, 295 fatalities were recorded between June and September in the two countries, exceeding figures for the first six months of the year. In Nigeria, Boko Haram continued to conduct raids and incursions, often using suicide bombers, usually women and girls, and improvised explosive devices targeting crowded places. Security forces were also targeted, as illustrated by the raid on a military base conducted in the town of Marte, Borno State, on 13 October and the attack on a military convoy carried out near Damboa, Borno State, on 18 October. Eleven cases of abduction by Boko Haram were also recorded during the reporting period. Of the approximately 32 people abducted, 19 were reportedly minors, including 13 girls. Meanwhile, significant numbers of Boko Haram fighters surrendered to national authorities.

23. The withdrawal of Chadian troops from the Multinational Joint Task Force in the Niger, which was completed in September, had an impact on the response effort of the Force. In addition, allegations of human rights violations by security personnel undermined cooperation with affected communities and intelligence-gathering.

24. The Peace and Security Council of the African Union visited the Lake Chad basin from 27 to 31 July. It subsequently adopted a decision, on 28 September, in which it expressed concern about the resource challenges facing the Multinational Joint Task Force, reaffirmed the need for a comprehensive approach in efforts to combat Boko Haram and called for a dedicated summit of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and ECOWAS to be held to develop a strategy for the promotion of peace, security and development in the Lake Chad basin.

25. From 2 to 4 November, the African Union and the Lake Chad Basin Commission convened a regional stabilization conference in N'Djamena on supporting the development of a framework for a regional stabilization strategy for areas affected by Boko Haram. Conference participants recommended the establishment of a task force for the development of a comprehensive strategy for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration activities in the areas affected by Boko Haram.

Sahel/Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel

26. Following the adoption by the Security Council of its resolution 2359 (2017) on the deployment of the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel), a delegation from the Council visited Burkina Faso, Mali and Mauritania from 19 to 22 October. Subsequently, on 30 October, the Council convened a ministerial meeting on the Force, during which I gave a briefing on the status of its operationalization. I reaffirmed the need for the Force to have sound mechanisms for the protection of civilians. I also reaffirmed the necessity of a comprehensive approach to addressing the root causes of the situation in the Sahel.

27. On 8 December, the Security Council adopted resolution 2391 (2017), in which it set out the modalities for United Nations support to the Force. I was requested to conclude a technical agreement among the States members of the G-5 Sahel, the European Union and the United Nations for the provision of operational and logistical support to the Force through the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali.

28. On 13 July, the President of France, Emmanuel Macron, the Chancellor of Germany, Angela Merkel, and the European Union announced the launch of the Alliance for the Sahel, intended to ensure security and stability in the short term and development in the long term in the region. The initiative involves other States members of the European Union, the World Bank Group, the African Development Bank and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and is intended to fast track the provision of assistance, including the mobilization of resources for the Joint Force. On 13 December, the President of France convened a high-level meeting with the States members of the G-5 Sahel and their partners in Paris to mobilize support for the Force.

C. Socioeconomic trends

29. West African economies continued their positive trajectory. Economic growth rates of 2.5 per cent in 2017 and 4 per cent in 2018 have been forecast by the African Development Bank for West Africa, owing mainly to improvements in oil production in Nigeria and rising global commodity prices. According to the International Monetary Fund, the economies of Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal are expected to expand in 2017 by 7.6 per cent and 6.8 per cent, respectively, driven mostly by agriculture and investments in the private and public sectors. Ghana is also registering its best performance in three years, while recovery is slower in Liberia and Mauritania, at 2.6 per cent and 3.8 per cent, respectively.

D. Humanitarian trends

30. Widespread food insecurity, forced displacement, climate change, chronic vulnerability and susceptibility to epidemics continued to affect populations in West Africa and the Sahel. More than 5,300 cases of cholera were registered in the north-eastern part of Nigeria and some 2,035 cases of hepatitis E in the Diffa region of the Niger. Across the subregion, some 30 million people remain food-insecure and 4.7 million children under 5 years of age are acutely malnourished. The number of people classified as severely food-insecure has risen by 500,000 in the Lake Chad basin since the beginning of the year, owing mainly to the Boko Haram crisis. In Mali, the number of persons requiring immediate food assistance increased by 350,000 between March and August. In north-eastern Nigeria, increased international and government relief assistance has helped to avert the threat of famine. Food security is expected to slightly improve in the coming months, owing in part to an increase in agricultural production and a reduction in food prices.

31. The number of people suffering from the consequences of forced displacement as a result of conflict and insecurity rose to 5.2 million from 4.9 million at the beginning of the year. More than 2.4 million persons remain displaced in the Lake Chad basin area owing to Boko Haram activities, including nearly 1.7 million in Nigeria. More than 208,400 Nigerian refugees are displaced in neighbouring Cameroon, Chad and the Niger, which also host sizeable populations of internally displaced persons. Insecurity in the Diffa region of the Niger led to cross-border movements of several thousand persons to Chad. In Mali, continuing violence in the Ségou, Kidal, Mopti, Timbuktu and Ménaka regions led to a slight increase in the number of internally displaced persons (from 52,000 in May to 58,600 in September). Some 142,386 Malian refugees remain dispersed in Burkina Faso, Mauritania and the Niger, while growing insecurity in the border areas of Burkina Faso and the Niger has reduced absorption capacity for refugees from Mali. The insecurity in northern Mali and north-eastern Nigeria has limited humanitarian access and led to a suspension of lifesaving humanitarian deliveries to those areas. Moreover, in Togo, following raids

and arrests reportedly conducted by national security forces in the aftermath of the opposition's demonstrations, some 500 persons from Mango, in the Savanes region, reportedly crossed over into the villages of Chereponi and Zabzugu in the Northern region of Ghana.

32. During the reporting period, severe cases of flooding resulted in loss of life, destruction of infrastructure and population displacement in several countries in the region. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, as at mid-October, some 11,000 people were affected in Mali, 11,800 in Ghana, 30,000 in Burkina Faso, 100,000 in Nigeria and 200,000 in the Niger. In Sierra Leone, a landslide and floods claimed the lives of more than 600 people and displaced more than 6,000.

33. The humanitarian response to the Lake Chad basin crisis, scaled up further in 2017, has reached more than 5 million people. Needs, however, are likely to remain acute into 2018 and beyond, and sustained aid and recovery efforts will be required. By September, of the $1.5 billion required to address humanitarian needs in the Lake Chad basin for 2017, only 54 per cent had been received. United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations are still seeking $661 million to address the most urgent needs until the end of the year.

E. Trends on human rights

34. Some progress was made in strengthening legal, policy and institutional frameworks to protect and promote international human rights standards in some countries in the region. In September, the President of the Gambia signed the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, aiming at the abolition of the death penalty. Moreover, a technical committee for the establishment of a truth, reconciliation and reparations commission launched countrywide consultations. The Commission of Inquiry, established to track assets held by the former President, Yahya Jammeh, also began its work. Meanwhile, national and international civil society groups announced in October an international campaign to seek justice for victims of the former regime.

35. In Nigeria, the Government took specific steps to ensure accountability for crimes committed by Boko Haram, by initiating the trial of alleged perpetrators. The Government reported that 45 of the some 1,700 accused had been sentenced, while 468 had been ordered to undergo deradicalization programmes. Moreover, in response to reports alleging human rights violations, including extrajudicial executions and torture by the security forces, Nigeria established a judicial commission to review the compliance of its armed forces with international human rights and humanitarian law in the fight against extremism.

36. In Burkina Faso on 27 July, the President, Roch Marc Christian Kaboré, promulgated a law establishing measures for the protection of human rights defenders. On 25 October, the trial of alleged perpetrators of the failed coup of September 2015 began.

37. In Côte d'Ivoire, perceptions of impunity for crimes committed during the post-electoral crisis of 2010 and 2011, in addition to intercommunal clashes linked to access to land, undermined social cohesion and national reconciliation. In Guinea, human rights and civil society organizations welcomed the announcement by the Minister of Justice on 8 November that investigations into the stadium massacre of September 2009 had been concluded. The Minister, however, stated that the beginning of the trial on the massacre might be delayed owing to a lack of funds.

38. In Togo, at least 14 people died during clashes with security forces. Confrontations between civilians and security agencies also claimed casualties in Guinea, where at least 4 civilians were killed and 77 other people, including security forces, were wounded. In Nigeria, human rights organizations condemned the alleged arbitrary arrest and torture by the military of people affiliated with the Indigenous People of Biafra movement engaged in secessionist protests.

39. Recent media reports on trafficking in persons in Libya linked to illegal migration, including from the region of West Africa and the Sahel, sparked international outrage. In my statement of 20 November, I urged the international community to unite in fighting that scourge. I also discussed the issue with international partners on the margins of the Fifth African Union-European Union Summit, held in Abidjan on 29 and 30 November. At the summit, the two organizations adopted a joint statement on the migrant situation in Libya, in which they condemned the inhumane treatment of African migrants and refugees by criminal groups. The African Union, the European Union and the United Nations also agreed to put in place a joint task force, aimed at saving and protecting the lives of migrants and refugees along the routes, in particular inside Libya.

F. Trends on gender issues

40. During the reporting period, the number of women in senior government positions decreased in Guinea, the Niger and Sierra Leone. On 6 October in the Niger, the first ladies of the States members of ECOWAS called for an end to female genital mutilation in the subregion. ECOWAS, together with its partners, developed a regional action plan for the integration of a gender and youth dimension into efforts to combat money-laundering, the financing of terrorism and related crimes. In Nigeria, a national conference was held in September to build momentum for the implementation of the country's second national action plan on Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) and subsequent resolutions on women, youth and peace and security.

III. Activities of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel

A. Good offices and special assignments by my Special Representative

41. My Special Representative for West Africa and the Sahel continued to support efforts to sustain peace in the region, in collaboration with regional and international partners, by promoting and supporting inclusive national political dialogues, constitutional and democratic reforms, and transparent and peaceful electoral processes.

42. My Special Representative held extensive consultations with national stakeholders, regional institutions and leaders in support of a peaceful resolution of the political crisis in Togo. From 6 to 8 September, he undertook a mission to Lomé, during which he met the President, Faure Essozimna Gnassingbé, government officials, leaders of the opposition, representatives of civil society and the media and representatives of the international community. He appealed for restraint and urged political stakeholders to resolve their differences peacefully. Furthermore, he collaborated with the African Union and ECOWAS on the issuance of two joint communiques in which the parties were encouraged to engage in dialogue. He also held consultations with the President of Ghana, Nana Akuffo-Addo, and the Ghanaian

mediation team in the lead-up to the preliminary talks for the Togolese dialogue process, which began in Lomé on 27 November.

43. In line with Security Council resolution 2282 (2016), UNOWAS continued its efforts to help to sustain peace in Burkina Faso and the Gambia. Following a meeting with the President of Burkina Faso on 3 May, my Special Representative dispatched two support teams to Ouagadougou, in July and August, to enhance coordination with the United Nations country team. He returned to Ouagadougou on 31 August to discuss United Nations support for the organization of a national security forum, which was held in October and was attended by my Special Representative and the United Nations Resident Coordinator in Burkina Faso. Within the framework of the sustaining peace initiative, the United Nations deployed senior rule of law experts to provide technical assistance to the High Council for Reconciliation and National Unity, as well as advice to national authorities on justice and security sector reforms. The United Nations also facilitated consultations between the High Council and national stakeholders. The first meeting was held on 23 November in Ouagadougou, with the support of the Department of Political Affairs and the United Nations country team. Participants included representatives of political parties, civil society organizations, victims and think tanks, as well as members of the defence and security forces.

44. In the Gambia on 12 September, on the margins of the launch of the security sector reform process, my Special Representative discussed United Nations support for the country with the President. His visit was followed by a UNOWAS technical team mission to Banjul from 13 to 15 September, which was focused on coordinating sustaining peace initiatives with the United Nations country team. Throughout the reporting period, support provided by the senior communication adviser deployed by the Department of Political Affairs helped to enhance the Government's communication to the public at a time when expectations for democratic dividends and increased transparency were rising in the country.

45. My Special Representative met the President of the Niger, Mahamadou Issoufou, on 29 August and called for an inclusive political dialogue with the opposition. As a follow-up to the visit, my Special Representative dispatched a multidisciplinary team to the Niger from 2 to 10 October. In Guinea, he continued to work with national, regional and international partners to advocate the implementation of the political agreement of 12 October 2016. He held informal consultations with Guinean government officials and international partners in the country on the margins of a workshop on lessons learned from the 2015/16 elections in West Africa, held in Conakry on 25 and 26 July 2017.

46. My Special Representative dispatched two UNOWAS missions to Mauritania to engage with national stakeholders on the constitutional process. He continued consultations with the President, including on the margins of the General Assembly.

47. Following the closure of the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire in June, my Special Representative visited Côte d'Ivoire from 18 to 20 July to hold consultations with national and international stakeholders. He also dispatched an integrated mission from UNOWAS in October to provide support to the United Nations Resident Coordinator.

48. My Special Representative visited Freetown following the mudslide disaster of 14 August. In anticipation of the elections to be held in Sierra Leone in March 2018, he conducted another mission to the country, from 19 to 23 November, with the President of the ECOWAS Commission, Marcel de Souza, and the Commissioner for Political Affairs of the African Union, Minata Samate Cessouma.

49. My Special Representative conducted a mission to Liberia from 8 to 12 October to hold consultations with my Special Representative for Liberia and Head of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), on transition arrangements following the closure of UNMIL. He also interacted with presidential candidates and electoral observation missions, and discussed subregional issues with the President, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf. The mission was preceded by a UNOWAS multidisciplinary technical mission that identified areas of cooperation with the United Nations country team in Liberia. The technical mission also participated in a workshop for national stakeholders, jointly organized by ECOWAS and the Mano River Union and entitled "Partnering for peaceful elections in Liberia".

50. In his capacity as my High-level Representative for Nigeria, my Special Representative undertook a mission to the country from 30 October to 9 November. He continued consultations with the President, state governors and key national stakeholders to promote the establishment of a consensual national peace architecture. He also underscored the importance of the unity of Nigeria and called for timely preparations for the general elections scheduled for February 2019. On 8 November in Abuja, he, together with ECOWAS, launched a study on pastoralism, security and sustainable livelihoods in West Africa.

B. Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission

51. Insecurity in areas affected by Boko Haram continued to hinder the activities of the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission. Tensions in the Bakassi area were swiftly resolved with the support of the Commission. Nevertheless, as reported in my letter to the Security Council on progress made by the Commission (S/2017/78), increased agitation in English-speaking areas of Cameroon continued to generate concern.

52. On 14 and 15 September, my Special Representative, who also serves as Chair of the Commission, facilitated a meeting in Abuja between Cameroonian and Nigerian delegations, who agreed on an agenda for resolving security concerns and outstanding areas of disagreement. The meeting was preceded, from 24 to 28 August in Geneva, by deliberations of the Subcommission on Demarcation, whose report was adopted by the two parties. Overall, the parties reaffirmed their commitment to implementing the judgment of the International Court of Justice of October 2002 and to fully demarcating the land and maritime boundaries shared by the two countries. Meanwhile, procurement and related activities were completed for the resumption of pillar construction and emplacement in December.

C. Enhancing subregional capacities to address cross-border and cross-cutting threats to peace and security

Enhancing subregional capacities

53. UNOWAS and the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA) supported the organization of an interregional workshop on best practices for the ECOWAS Commission and the ECCAS general secretariat, held in Abuja from 11 to 13 September. During the workshop, the two organizations agreed to sign a memorandum of understanding to broaden and institutionalize their cooperation, including through interregional meetings and joint planning. UNOWAS participated in a joint retreat of the African Union, ECCAS and ECOWAS on early warning systems, held in Dakar from 16 to 20 October. UNOWAS also participated in a workshop, held in Dakar from 30 October to 3 November, on the revision of the indicators of the ECOWAS early warning system against the background of emerging peace and security challenges in the subregion.

Security sector reform

54. UNOWAS continued to engage with ECOWAS in support of the operationalization of its framework on security sector reform and governance. In May, ECOWAS, the European Union and UNOWAS conducted a joint security sector reform mission to the Gambia. Following the mission, an office of national security was established and a national security adviser was appointed. Meanwhile, senior members of the military command were replaced and several soldiers were detained or dismissed over allegations that they had attempted to destabilize the country. On 12 September, my Special Representative attended the official launch of the security sector reform process chaired by the President.

55. In Burkina Faso, the Senior Security Sector Reform Adviser deployed by the United Nations supported a needs assessment of the security sector, promoted synergies between defence and security forces and advocated the streamlining of rule of law and democratic governance procedures. On 24 October, my Special Representative participated in the opening of a three-day national security forum, organized with the support of UNOWAS and the United Nations country team, at which key elements of a new national security policy were identified. The forum was preceded by regional consultations and the deployment of a multidisciplinary team from UNDP and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations to ensure an inclusive and participatory process.

56. In Guinea, the United Nations security sector support project was harmonized with initiatives being carried out in the police and justice sectors.

Boko Haram

57. My Special Representative continued to support diplomatic, security and humanitarian responses to the violence perpetrated by Boko Haram. During the reporting period, he promoted a joint initiative by the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate and UNODC to assist States members of the Lake Chad Basin Commission in prosecuting, rehabilitating and reintegrating persons associated with Boko Haram. Activities under the initiative have begun in Nigeria, as have preparations in other countries of the Lake Chad basin. With the support of the European Union, the Executive Directorate and UNODC also assisted Nigerian authorities in strengthening criminal justice responses to terrorism, including by facilitating inter-agency coordination and cooperation in investigations and prosecutions. Under the overall coordination of the Nigerian office of the National Security Adviser, the Executive Directorate, UNODC, the European Union and the International Organization for Migration conducted a joint planning mission to Maiduguri, Nigeria, from 18 to 22 September.

58. On 6 October, my Special Representatives for West Africa and the Sahel and for Central Africa convened a joint meeting of UNOWAS and UNOCA in Dakar to discuss ways to enhance coordination and support for regional partners. Discussions were focused on joint support for the Lake Chad Basin Commission and the efforts to combat Boko Haram, in addition to other areas of cooperation, including maritime security. As part of his tour to Nigeria from 30 October to 9 November, my Special Representative stressed the need for regional and international partners to assist Nigeria in combating Boko Haram.

Strategy for cross-border security in the Mano River Union

59. On 11 and 12 July, UNOWAS met the secretariat of the Mano River Union in Freetown to discuss ways to reinforce cooperation. They agreed to step up engagement with UNDP and UNMIL ahead of the Mission's drawdown. On

24 August, my Special Representative met with the Secretary-General of the Mano River Union in Freetown to discuss steps needed to formalize a joint cooperation framework.

Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea

60. During the reporting period, the Interregional Coordination Centre in Yaoundé became operational. At a meeting held in Yaoundé on 16 and 17 August, UNOCA and UNOWAS contributed to an evaluation of the implementation of the Code of Conduct concerning the Repression of Piracy, Armed Robbery against Ships and Illicit Maritime Activity in West and Central Africa. In September, UNOWAS held consultations with the Centre's leadership during a meeting of the chiefs of navies of Central and West Africa convened in Dakar. My Special Representative also continued his advocacy to enhance coordination and information-sharing, and urged Member States to deploy permanent staff to the Regional Centre for Maritime Security in West Africa, based in Abidjan. From 16 to 20 October, within the framework of the "Africa-China-United States Consultation for Peace" facilitated by the Carter Center, my Special Representative led a delegation, including the Director of the Interregional Coordination Centre and the Secretary-General of the Lake Chad Basin Commission, to Beijing to foster cooperation with Chinese counterparts.

Drug trafficking and transnational organized crime

61. My Special Representative chaired a meeting of the West Africa Coast Initiative Policy Committee, held in Abidjan on 5 December. At the meeting, the Ministers of Security and Justice of Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia and Sierra Leone discussed ways to enhance the operations and financial sustainability of the transnational organized crime units within the framework of the implementation of the ECOWAS action plan on illicit drug trafficking, organized crime and drug abuse for the period 2016–2020. In addition, UNOWAS engaged in close liaison with UNODC with regard to the implementation of several current projects, including the development of curricula on organized crime and efforts to combat corruption for police, gendarmerie and judicial training schools; the establishment of joint airport interdiction task forces in Burkina Faso, Guinea-Bissau and Nigeria; and support for courts in francophone countries in the launch of the Global Judicial Integrity Network in 2018.

D. Implementation of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel and support for the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel

62. UNOWAS continued to advance the implementation of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel through a whole-of-system approach. Progress was made on a more effective division of labour, reduction in duplications and cooperation between the field and Headquarters.

63. On 7 July, the Executive Committee working group on the Sahel, chaired by the Deputy Secretary-General, held its inaugural meeting. On 11 August, it endorsed an action plan for the implementation of the strategy, established a clear division of roles and responsibilities between United Nations entities, agreed on a timeline of action and emphasized the need to strengthen collaboration with all regional partners. It also conducted a mapping of activities by the United Nations and international partners in the Sahel, which revealed that only 30 per cent of planned resources were available for the implementation of the strategy, highlighted the challenges linked to the limited absorption capacity of targeted countries and coordination challenges among partners.

It recommended, among other things, that strategic coordination should be improved, the Sustainable Development Goals mainstreamed, public trust in the State enhanced and governance and human rights strengthened.

64. A meeting of the steering committee for the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel, convened and chaired by UNOWAS and attended by the Deputy Secretary-General, was held on 27 October in Dakar, bringing together United Nations entities. The participants reiterated the need to ensure that interventions under the strategy were aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals and complemented the priorities of the region.

65. The Deputy Secretary-General strengthened coordination and cooperation with France and Germany under the framework of the Alliance for the Sahel, which recognized the strategy as overarching framework for the international response to the issues affecting the Sahel. UNOWAS continued to support the Ministerial Coordination Platform for the Sahel chaired by Chad. In that regard, it facilitated discussions between the President of Chad and United Nations regional entities to ensure alignment of the Platform's thematic groups on security, governance, development and resilience with the strategy's working groups. UNOWAS also supported visits to all G-5 Sahel countries by the President of Chad and the African Union Mission for Mali and the Sahel to help to increase coordination. From 9 to 11 October, the Chadian and Mission delegations, accompanied by UNOWAS, met the G-5 Sahel secretariat in Nouakchott.

66. UNOWAS also continued to support the G-5 Sahel in building regional security cooperation mechanisms. In that regard, a feasibility study was concluded with respect to the establishment of a Sahelian threat analysis and early warning centre, which is expected to be established in 2018 in Mauritania. UNOWAS, the Department of Political Affairs and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) also participated in a United Nations scoping mission, led by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations from 20 to 24 September, to all G-5 Sahel countries on the operationalization of the Joint Force. The mission facilitated the gathering of information on progress made in establishing the Force. The findings of the scoping mission informed my report to the Security Council on the Force (S/2017/869).

67. In accordance with Security Council resolution 2195 (2014) and the statement by the President of the Security Council of 8 December 2015 (S/PRST/2015/24), the Office of Counter-Terrorism continues its efforts to provide capacity-building assistance to the States members of the G-5 Sahel through the regional Integrated Assistance for Countering Terrorism Initiative, the priority areas of which are aligned with a need assessment conducted by United Nations entities and approved by the G-5 Sahel countries. Priorities include the prevention of violent extremism, border management and cross-border cooperation, the rule of law and criminal justice, and coordination.

68. A regional workshop on border security management for the countries of the G-5 Sahel was held under the Integrated Assistance for Countering Terrorism Initiative framework in Niamey from 5 to 8 September. It was organized in collaboration with the permanent secretariat of the G-5 Sahel and the liaison cell of UNOWAS. Attended by senior practitioners from the G-5 Sahel countries, it was focused on strengthening intra- and inter-agency cooperation, with a view to countering terrorism and stemming the flow of foreign terrorist fighters in the region.

F. Promotion of good governance, respect for the rule of law, human rights and gender mainstreaming

69. On 25 and 26 July in Conakry, UNOWAS conducted a workshop on lessons learned from the 2015/16 elections in West Africa. More than 50 representatives of electoral management bodies and other stakeholders, including United Nations entities from the subregion, exchanged views on how to enhance the quality of upcoming electoral processes in West Africa. Participants emphasized the need for inclusive political dialogue and for the establishment of reliable civil registries to permit the regular updating of electoral registers.

70. From 28 October to 4 November, UNOWAS participated in the sixty-first ordinary session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, held in Banjul. It supported the forum of non-governmental organizations accompanying the session and co-chaired two panels on human rights issues in West Africa and the Sahel.

71. UNOWAS continued to promote the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) and subsequent resolutions on women, youth and peace and security. At a conference on peace education held in Accra on 27 and 28 July, UNOWAS advocated the regular holding of national conferences to disseminate and implement resolution 2250 (2015) on youth and peace and security. UNOWAS also contributed to an international youth forum on peace, security and irregular migration, held in Niamey on 9 and 10 August under the patronage of the President. At the event, participants from 25 countries, mostly in West Africa, recommended the creation of an enabling environment for youth entrepreneurship and the involvement of youth leaders in conflict management. On 29 August, UNOWAS hosted an exchange session on the role of youth in the prevention of violent extremism in West Africa and the Sahel, organized by the Working Group on Women, Youth, Peace and Security in West Africa and the Sahel. On 15 November, my Special Representative addressed youth leaders in Ghana on the theme "Equipping the youth to renegotiate Africa's position in the era of Africa's rising".

72. UNOWAS undertook joint missions with representatives of the ECOWAS Gender Development Centre, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, OHCHR and the Working Group on Women, Youth, Peace and Security in West Africa and the Sahel, to Cotonou, Praia and N'Djamena to advocate the adoption of national action plans as called for in Security Council resolutions on women, youth and peace and security. On the International Day of Peace, 21 September, UNOWAS organized a conference in partnership with the Senegalese section of the Working Group, bringing together more than 100 women and youth leaders to discuss migration, statelessness and other challenges. In addition, UNOWAS provided technical and financial support for the establishment of the Senegal-Gambia-Guinea-Bissau Women's Forum.

IV. Observations and recommendations

73. There were several positive developments in West Africa and the Sahel during the reporting period, notably progress made by some countries in carrying out political, constitutional and security sector reforms.

74. I commend the authorities in Burkina Faso and the Gambia for the progress achieved in reforming their security sectors. I also welcome continuing efforts by the authorities in Côte d'Ivoire to fully reform its security sector, and encourage them to remain focused on advancing national reconciliation and social cohesion, including by addressing issues relating to land ownership and citizenship.

75. I commend the people of Liberia for their peaceful participation in the legislative elections and in the first round of the run-off. I call upon national actors to ensure the peaceful holding of the run-off. I reaffirm the commitment of the United Nations to continuing to assist the authorities in consolidating peace and promoting sustainable and inclusive development. Following the closure of UNMIL in March 2018, UNOWAS will continue to follow developments in Liberia in the context of its regional mandate.

76. I urge national stakeholders in Sierra Leone to work together to ensure a level playing field for all candidates ahead of the country's first elections without the presence of a United Nations mission.

77. I welcome the continuing regional efforts aimed at assisting national stakeholders in Togo to overcome their differences peacefully through dialogue and in line with the democratic aspirations of the Togolese people.

78. I remain worried by the prevalence of terrorist and violent extremist threats in the region and the linkages with transnational organized crime. I note with concern the continued armed attacks by militant and extremist groups on civilian targets. I am particularly concerned about the related closure of schools in affected areas in Burkina Faso and Mali, which is depriving the younger generation of their right to education. I congratulate the Government of Nigeria on conducting trials of Boko Haram suspects, and urge it to ensure due process and transparency by granting access to human rights observers. I also welcome the establishment by Nigeria of a judicial commission to uphold compliance by its armed forces with national laws and international human rights standards.

79. I commend the efforts of the countries participating in the Multinational Joint Task Force, which have reduced the operational capacities and geographical reach of Boko Haram. Nevertheless, persistent attacks are hampering resettlement and rehabilitation efforts and provide a breeding ground for extremism. I reiterate my call for stronger partnership among the affected countries, as well as with regional organizations, including the African Union, and underscore the need for all counter-insurgency efforts to be carried out in full compliance with international humanitarian, human rights and refugee law. I reiterate my call upon the international community to increase its political, humanitarian, early recovery, logistical and financial assistance to the affected countries and to the Task Force and the Lake Chad Basin Commission.

80. I encourage countries of the Lake Chad basin to continue their efforts to reintegrate Boko Haram victims and other categories of individuals associated with Boko Haram, and urge the international community to assist them in that endeavour. I reiterate my call for a regional strategy for addressing the root causes of the crisis in the basin. In that regard, I welcome the holding of the first regional stabilization conference in the basin region and hope that the conference will be the first step towards the development of such a strategy.

81. I urge national authorities not to relent in their efforts to provide critical humanitarian assistance to vulnerable communities and to advocate the disbursement of outstanding funds pledged at the Oslo Humanitarian Conference for Nigeria and the Lake Chad Region, held in February 2017.

82. I welcome the support that regional and international partners continue to provide to the countries and people of the Sahel and urge them to join their efforts and increase their contributions in line with the growing needs in the region and in alignment with national and regional priorities. It is important to ensure that all efforts are well coordinated and complementary. The challenges in the Sahel are complex and multidimensional and require a sustained and holistic approach. In that regard, I

welcome the collegial efforts made by the entire United Nations system under the leadership of the Deputy Secretary-General towards recalibrating the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel and further boosting its implementation through a more integrated, cross-pillar approach. These efforts will contribute to mobilizing additional resources for the Sahel and ensure that adequate support is provided and that the aid of the international community is well coordinated, complementary and in support of the countries of the Sahel.

83. I urge the international community to complement the security and military response to the Sahel crisis with development programmes to address the root causes of conflict, prevent tensions and violence, tackle exclusion and poverty, strengthen the resilience of institutions and communities and build peaceful and inclusive societies.

84. I commend the States members of the G-5 Sahel for their continued dedicated efforts to operationalize the Joint Force, as well as the strengthening of development aspects. I also extend my appreciation to the members of the Security Council for their support for that initiative. I reaffirm the urgent need for the establishment of an institutional, human rights and compliance framework for the Joint Force. These mechanisms are critical to ensure that its operations are aligned with and contribute to broader regional initiatives and do not harm the very populations whom the Force is intended to serve and contribute to strengthening their resilience to conflict.

85. I urge the international community to unite in fighting the scourge of trafficking in persons and to address migration flows in a comprehensive and human manner. A comprehensive regional approach to migration focusing on the protection of the rights of migrants, addressing the socioeconomic drivers of migration and promoting safe, regular and orderly migration is needed.

86. I note with concern the decline in the number of women in senior government positions in West Africa and the Sahel and urge countries in the subregion to take specific measures, in accordance with national and regional commitments, to enhance the empowerment of and political opportunities for women and promote inclusive development.

87. I welcome the commitment expressed by the Governments of Cameroon and Nigeria to completing the demarcation of the land and maritime boundaries shared by the two countries. I call upon partners to further support the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission to allow for the completion of its mandate and to give effect to the judgment of the International Court of Justice of 10 October 2002.

88. I wish to express my appreciation to the Governments of West Africa and the Sahel region, the African Union, ECOWAS, the G-5 Sahel, the Mano River Union, the Gulf of Guinea Commission and the Lake Chad Basin Commission for their continued cooperation with UNOWAS. I also extend my appreciation to the United Nations system in West Africa and the Sahel, civil society organizations and other institutions for their close partnership with UNOWAS in the implementation of its mandate. I should like to express particular appreciation to my Special Representative, as well as the staff of UNOWAS and the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission, for their continuing efforts to help to advance peace and security in West Africa and the Sahel.